

# AiMBY

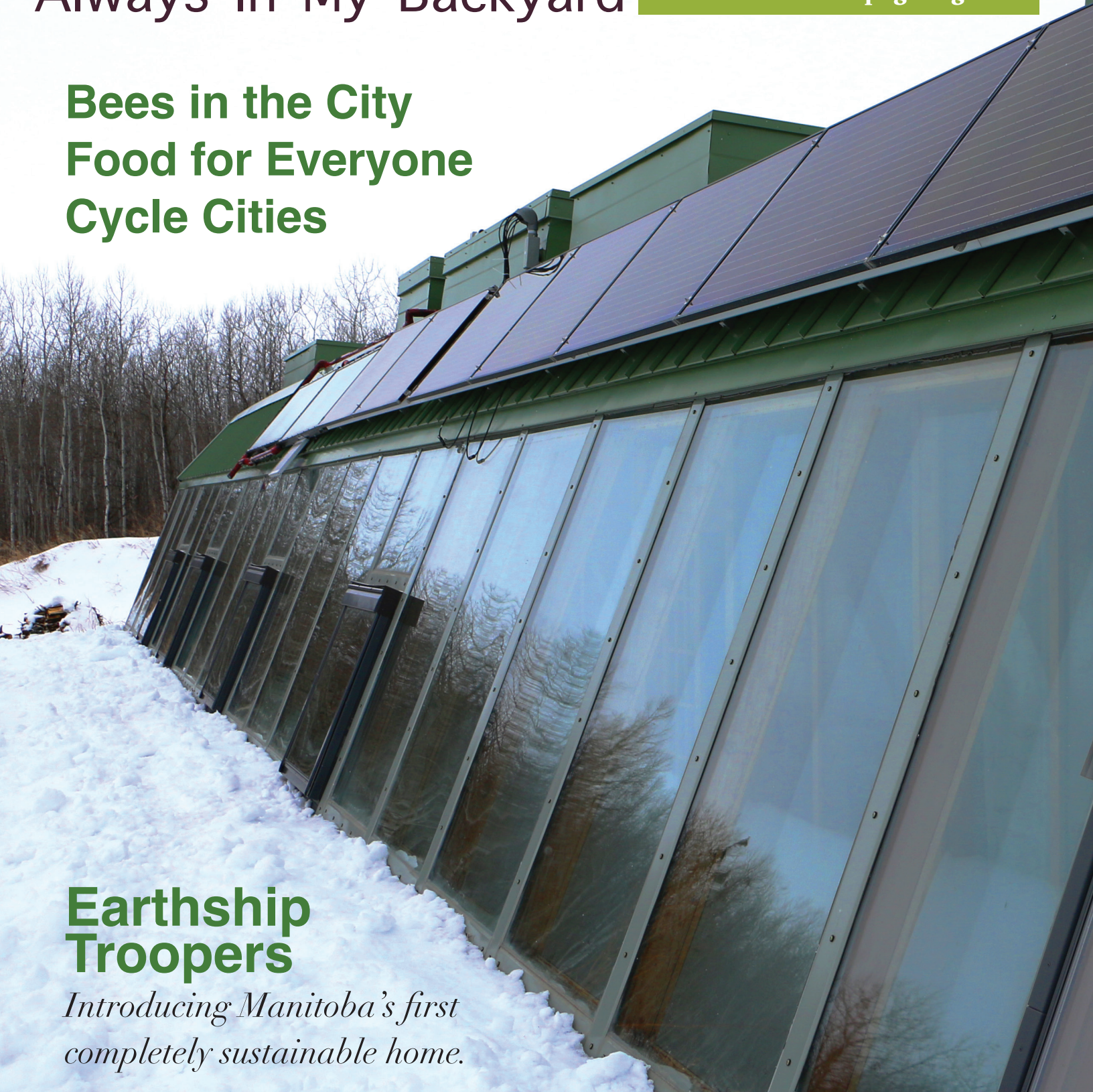
Always In My Backyard

Sustainable Winnipeg Magazine

Bees in the City  
Food for Everyone  
Cycle Cities

Earthship  
Troopers

*Introducing Manitoba's first  
completely sustainable home.*





## Contributors



# AIMBY

Always in my Backyard Sustainable Winnipeg Magazine

The AIMBY magazine team is made up of four Creative Communications students at Red River College of Applied Arts, Science and Technology (RRC). We are Journalism, Media Production, Public Relations, and Advertising Majors that are passionate about creating a sustainable city.



*Colin Roy*  
Media Production Major

Prior to enrolling at RRC, Colin earned his Certificate of Documentary Film Production at Capilano University in North Vancouver. Outside of school, Colin has a strong interest in social and cultural issues Worldwide. He currently lives in Wolseley with his partner, his two dogs Leela and Dexter, and his cat Moe.



*Joy Balmana*  
Public Relations Major

Prior to enrolling at RRC, Joy graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Joy is a self-proclaimed food adventurer. She can't resist eating KFC (Korean fried chicken). Her career goal is to kick butt as a social media coordinator and event-planning mastermind. Joy currently lives in St. James with her fiancé and her cat Candy.



*Nolan Kowal*  
Journalism Major

Prior to enrolling at RRC, Nolan graduated from The University of Winnipeg with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Rhetoric & Communications. He plays sports in his spare time, including ball hockey, curling, volleyball, and tennis. In the summer months, you can almost always find Nolan fishing at his parent's cottage on Lake Winnipeg.



*Stephanie Setka*  
Advertising Major

Prior to enrolling at RRC, Stephanie studied at the University of Winnipeg and Herzing College. In her spare time, Stephanie is an avid rugby player. She has been playing the sport since high school. She also loves to read and blog about books and movies. She can speak English, French, and Spanish.

## Mission Statement

Our mission is to further engage citizens in sustainable development within the rapidly growing city of Winnipeg. We will spark the passion in Winnipeggers to create a more sustainable city through permaculture, public transportation, and sustainable business growth. We encourage our readers to act now.



Always in my Backyard **Sustainable Winnipeg Magazine**

**SPRING 2016**

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# EARTHSHIP TROOPERS

**Written and photographed by Colin Roy**

*Having to pay constant water, electricity, and high property taxes is causing some people to build self-sustaining homes called Earthships. They collect rainwater, produce electricity, use a natural ventilation system and have a greenhouse attached to the front of the home to grow food. Chris Plantz and Nicole Bennett are the first to complete and live in an Earthship in Manitoba. They are a growing trend with at least two more currently under construction in the province.*



**L**iving off the grid in Winnipeg can be hard to imagine with the city's extreme climate, but married couple Kris Plantz and Nicole Bennett have been living in Manitoba's first Earthship for over three years. The home has a cozy and inviting atmosphere resembling a modern Hobbit home. While Bennett says it continues to be a learning process, they've been living happily in the earth-sheltered home for over three years.

An Earthship is a home made from natural and recycled material like earth-filled tires and recycled bottles. It is built to be 100 per cent self-sustaining. They use only rainwater and run off solar electricity and propane appliances. Earthships are marketed and designed





Chris Plantz and Nicole Bennett are great partners for all projects they undertake.

by Earthship Biotecture in New Mexico. Plans can be customized and bought from them, which cost anywhere from \$10 000 - \$35 000. Bennett and Plantz are the first to get a construction mortgage (\$250 000) and receive insurance for an Earthship in Manitoba.

Bennett says building an Earthship wasn't something they'd always thought about doing.

*"We were inspired after watching Garbage Warriors, an inspiring Michael Reynolds documentary about a year living off the grid," she says.*

Their home runs off four reservoirs built into the earth-sheltered home. They collect rainwater that is then pressurized, heated and distributed. The water is used a maximum of four times for different processes throughout the home to minimize water consumption. For instance—A typical home uses most of its water flushing toilets, but the Earthship uses water that has already been used once for bathing or washing dishes as 'grey water' that is used to flush the toilets.

"[Earthships] definitely make you more conscious and aware of the water you use, which is the way it should be," Bennett says with a smile on her face.

In winter they have to hope the reservoirs are full and that they don't run out of collected rainwater. This is their third winter in their home and they never run out of water because of the efficient water recycling system.

The Earthship is positioned to absorb a maximum amount of sunlight year-round and the home maintains comfortable temperatures throughout the year. Plantz says the plans Earthship Biotecture provided had flaws and unpredictable situations arose. He says Earthships are designed in dryer climates so it's the high humidity that's been the biggest problem preventing them from growing vegetables year-round in their greenhouse.

Earthships are designed with a large greenhouse to grow food at the front of the structure, which has to be sealed up in the winter months.

As Plantz neatly piles firewood into the empty greenhouse garden beds, he says it's common for people who live in climates with vast ranges of temperatures to have these issues because Earthships were designed in a more moderate climate zone.

"We've heard of people building these in Ontario, Georgia, and New York where they have intense humidity like us. And humidity is their problem as well because Earthships rely on natural ventilation," he says.

Right now Plantz is working on a solar powered system to get more airflow out of the greenhouse in the winter months. Their summer gardens thrived and they canned 1,500 pounds of tomatoes. He also harvested many cucumbers and dried herbs. They sold vegetables

to five families over the summer and to some farmers markets but preserved a large portion of their food for themselves. Next year they plan on feeding 15-20 families.

Plantz says the solar installation was also tricky because not many electricians know Direct Current (D/C) electricity, which is what the home works with. As Bennett boils water on her propane stove and their two-year-old daughter Bridget is happily stuffing her face with oatmeal, Bennett says they are currently working on a backup hot water system. Their home has no hot water for a quarter of the year due to short winter days with minimal direct sunlight.

*"I think I struggle with it a bit more than he does, and we're working on getting a backup system," she laughs.*

With the current system they have in place, they need four days of direct winter sunlight and even then, they would only get minimal hot water. In the summer they have no hot water issues.

Bennett says some of the plans had some measurement issues but the construction went relatively smoothly. At first, friends and family helped them build on weekends and then they got involved with a volunteer based travel organization called Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WOOF) that offers hospitality to travelers in exchange for work on a farm. Later they got involved with the organization ThePOOSH.org, an online organization oriented toward building and hospitality, and this helped them finish the main structure of their home.

Scott Davidson, 29, is passionate about Earthships and was one



of the first people to contact the couple with interest in helping them build their home. He first got involved with the Earthship Academy in New Mexico through an internship in 2011 where he was doing odd jobs around the site. One day he was with the crew building bottle walls, and the next day he was pounding earth into tires or helping with carpentry. He says it was at Plantz and Bennett's build where he began to understand how the whole project comes together from start to finish.

Davidson is volunteering on another Earthship project this spring near Brandon, Manitoba. He is working on starting a business building Earthships in Canada.

*"If I want to continue building these I'm going to need to start making money," he says. Along the way, a few of the people who wanted to start a build fell through."*

Davidson says building an Earthship is a big commitment but is convinced they are great homes for people across Canada. He hopes to one day live in his own in Alberta or British Columbia.

While there have been ups, downs, and unexpected challenges, Bennett smiles when she says she is thrilled to continue living in their beautiful earth-sheltered home. For Bennett and Plantz, an Earthship is not just a home—it's a whole new way of living.

#### *Captions (From Top to Bottom)*

Intense humidity inside the home means Chris and Nicole are without a greenhouse until they can get more airflow out during the winter months./Colin Roy

The living room is in the same common area as the kitchen and is where the family spends most of their time./Colin Roy

Recycled bottles in the wall are for decoration and to let natural light pass between rooms./Colin Roy

Their daughter Bridget is currently sleeping in their bedroom, but the home has two bedrooms for when she grows out of her crib./Colin Roy





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